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DEPT FOR AF/SPG, A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/C, NSC FOR BPITTMAN
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ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

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SUBJECT: JEM AND SLA/U SHOW INCREASED COOPERATION IN GENEVA

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Europe-based representatives of SLA/Unity and JEM met in Geneva last week at meetings hosted by the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue ostensibly to discuss greater security for humanitarian operations in Darfur, but the workshop served as a springboard for mutual recognition and substantive political dialogue between these two mostly Zaghawa rebel groups that appear to be aligned closely on security issues (both receive support from Ndjamena and most observers assume they receive some support from Libya as well). The modest tangible progress from the sessions included an agreement to increase security and a method, with assistance from OCHA, to try to decrease hijackings and banditry. CHD and the JMST view the meeting as a confidence-building measure that will lead to additional talks between rebel groups as well as shuttle diplomacy once newly-appointed Chief Mediator Djibril Bassole arrives in Khartoum later this week. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) According to Theo Murphy of the Geneva-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD), and Amy Scott, Poloff with the Joint Mediation Support Team (JMST), discussions between representatives from the Sudanese Liberation Army/Unity (SLA/U) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) were positive and even somewhat substantive on security issues. Organized by CHD and the U.N.'s Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), with the JMST as an observer, the workshop was a modest effort at resuming formal mediation between Darfur rebel groups through the avenue of discussions on humanitarian coverage and security. The JMST also plans to pursue a strategy of shuttle diplomacy between rebels and the government once newly-appointed Chief Mediator Djibril Bassole arrives in Khartoum later this week and begins his work in earnest. Notably absent from the CHD meeting in Geneva were representatives from SLM/Abdul Wahid, who had cancelled at the last minute. Scott said the sessions marked a departure from previous JMST attempts at mediation; most remarkable was that JEM even agreed to meet with representatives from another rebel group, which demonstrates that JEM has begun to coordinate with SLA/U.

¶3. (SBU) Murphy described discussions on security as producing "modest progress," as foremost among OCHA's concerns were practical steps to improve delivery of humanitarian aid in Darfur, with the objective of reducing banditry, looting and carjacking that has crippled humanitarian operations. SLA/U and JEM insisted that the situation had deteriorated due to communication gaps following the fracturing of the rebel movements. They also said OCHA should play a more proactive role in contacting rebels when goods or vehicles had been taken, and coordinating their movements in advance. Rebels said that when aid agencies call numerous rebel contacts to track down the stolen items, thieves move more quickly to move the goods across the Chadian border. To remedy this, the participants agreed to a series of steps meant to create a network of points of contact within the movements to try and recover the goods, while OCHA agreed to serve as a focal point for the aggrieved parties.

¶4. (SBU) Non-humanitarian issues gained less traction with the rebels; both movements agreed to take steps to inform their commanders in the field not to use child soldiers, while any talks of a ceasefire remained hypothetical and only on the sidelines of the main discussion. On last week's attacks on a UNAMID convoy, all

participants roundly condemned the attacks in private, but SLA/U was coy when queried as to their participation. According to Scott, both groups privately denied taking part in the attacks which left seven dead, but SLA/U did not endeavor to deny making the attack in their post-workshop public statement. Speaking order at the final press conference became a point of tension, but the movements adopted a joint statement committing to humanitarian issues on principle, and promised to collaborate better with relief agencies.

15. (SBU) Scott noted that the statement in itself was "not at all that significant," adding that the rebels were "re-committing to things they violate everyday," but the statement may stand for a new willingness to engage from a political standpoint and the meeting sets the stage for future sessions. A second workshop is being planned for representatives of the Government of Sudan, and plans are in the works for a third workshop for all parties. Murphy believes that this meeting may be the first step to gathering a "critical mass" of Darfur rebels, which could eventually lead toward talks on a political settlement. Murphy suggested that obtaining this critical mass could begin without SLA/AW, but his participation would eventually be required. Murphy believes Abdelwahid should be pressured at the international level (e.g., the U.S. and France), and by his commanders on the ground, whom Murphy believes would welcome substantive discussions. While Murphy sees a Zaghawa political alliance as improbable (SLA/U is not fully comfortable with Khalil Ibrahim's islamist agenda), both CHD and the JMST remain optimistic that their efforts may lead toward more productive talks once the new Chief Mediator begins his work.

16. (SBU) According to the JMST and UNAMID, new Chief Mediator Djibril Bassole intends to arrive in Sudan at the end of this week for negotiations with GOS officials before traveling to El Fasher to begin establishing contacts and setting up an office. Still formally employed as Burkina Faso's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional

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Cooperation, Bassole has yet to appoint a special assistant, hire any staff, or deal directly with JMST staff in Sudan. JMST reports that JEM appears the most concerned regarding Bassole's appointment, as they would have preferred a higher-profile figure whom they believe would be less malleable to GOS manipulation.

17. (SBU) Comment: CHD's "critical mass" approach to peace talks requires the participation of Abdul Wahid al-Nur, who may never participate given his unrealistic demands and comfortable platform in Paris from which to pontificate on Darfur. A more modest "domino" approach to engaging the movements on security agreements with the GOS and UNAMID may be more realistic. The arrival of the Bassole, who we understand intends to pursue an intensive shuttle diplomacy strategy of continuous engagement with the movements, should give some momentum to what has been an entirely moribund process under the leadership of the part time joint special envoys Eliasson and Salim.

FERNANDEZ